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C O N F I D E N T I A L ISTANBUL 000797

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [GR](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH STRIKES BACK

REF: A. A) ATHENS 1550

[B](#). B) ISTANBUL 381

[C](#). C) ANKARA 1752

Classified By: Consul General David Arnett for Reasons 1.5 (b&d)

[1](#). (sbu) Summary: Following a decision by Archbishop Christodoulos of Greece to appoint three new bishops without his approval, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and an enlarged Holy Synod formally broke communion with Christodoulos on April 30 and called on the newly-appointed bishops not to assume their positions. It remains to be seen whether this latest salvo will lead to a resolution of the conflict or a permanent split within the Greek Orthodox Church. End Summary.

[2](#). (u) Ignoring a warning from Bartholomew, Archbishop Christodoulos of Greece led the Greek Holy Synod in electing 3 new bishops on April 26. As reported ref A, the dioceses in question are among the 36 "New Land" dioceses that belong to the Ecumenical Patriarchate but are "administered" by the Greek Orthodox Church under the authority of the 1928 Patriarchal and Synodical Act. In response, an enlarged meeting of the Major Holy and Sacred Resident Synod, including 41 bishops from Turkey and throughout the Greek Orthodox diaspora (including Archbishop Demetrios of America), convened in Istanbul and voted unanimously on April 30 to break "communion" with Christodoulos, declare the elections invalid, and enjoin the "elected" bishops not to assume their provinces (otherwise communion would be broken with them as well).

[3](#). (c) While the decision appears to be strictly canonical ("A Bishop should not venture to effect ordinations outside of his bounds"), the severity of the measure has sparked controversy among the Greek Orthodox community. Patriarchate officials justify the decision by citing a pattern of willful disobedience on the part of Christodoulos since he was elected in 1998. As stated in the April 30 Protocol, "...Christodoulos... repeatedly and frequently did willfully transgress... by seeking to be mentioned as Primate... by failing to observe (the Patriarchal and Synodical Act of 1928)... he persists in disorder, and harms himself and the pleroma of the Church, becoming thus the cause of scandal and division..." According to the Secretary of the Holy Synod Metropolitan Meliton, there is little love lost between Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and Christodoulos. Bartholomew himself told poloff that they rarely speak and that it had been almost a year since they had last done so.

[4](#). (c) A Patriarchal delegation traveled to Greece in early May to meet with the President, Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and senior parliamentarians to present their case. Metropolitan Meliton, who participated in the delegation, told poloff that their interlocutors were polite, but declined to get involved in the dispute. Meliton noted that he believes the new government is more sympathetic to Christodoulos than the previous PASOK government. Although there are only a few weeks remaining before the new bishops must legally assume their provinces, Meliton was hopeful that Christodoulos would back down and defuse the crisis. Asked what further steps might be taken against him, Meliton said that he could be declared "schismatic" and excommunicated from the Church.

[5](#). (c) Comment: Although the decision of the Patriarch and the Holy Synod would seem to contradict the uninformed but widely-held notion in Turkey that the "Greek Patriarch" is merely a stooge of Greece, the event passed with only limited news coverage and little notice in Istanbul. The participation of the diaspora, including the 6 new foreign members of the Holy Synod, may raise eyebrows in Ankara, however, as the Turkish government continues to ponder whether and how to respond to the inclusion of foreigners in the Synod (refs B and C). Finally, it is worth noting that Russian Orthodox Patriarch Alexy II, the Ecumenical Patriarch's most serious rival for authority within the Orthodox world, did not miss this opportunity to score points against Bartholomew by sending a public letter of support to

Christodoulos.
ARNETT